

How well English Language Learners can write is directly related to their **levels of English language proficiency in writing**. It is important to note that language learners often make mistakes in vocabulary and grammar. As they take risks and experiment, their accuracy levels may be negatively affected. It is important to realize that this is a normal part of the language development process. If too much attention is placed on accuracy, students will not progress. The following table indicates what students can do at each level of proficiency:

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES
NOVICE	Students can copy words and phrases and write them from memory. They can identify, list, and label. They can write one of more familiar phrases, statements, or questions in context.	Simple descriptions to accompany visuals; paragraph completion, cloze passages, dictations, filling-in forms, cinquain poetry, organization of information on graphic organizers.
INTERMEDIATE	Students can create statements and questions well enough to meet practical needs and limited social demands. They can write short messages, notes, letters, paragraphs, and short compositions and can take simple notes. They can compose a series of related sentences that describe or compare. They can narrate a sequence of events and write one or more sentences that classify, summarize, or predict.	Descriptions with visuals, cloze passages, sentence combining, elaboration, guided descriptions and narrations, compositions based on interviews, journals.
ADVANCED	Students can write social and more formal correspondence, discourse of several paragraphs, cohesive summaries with some details, and narrative and descriptive passages. They can take notes. They can express feelings and preferences and give supporting details. They can develop an organized composition, report, or article of more than one paragraph. They can explain their point of view simply.	Detailed descriptions, sentence combining, elaboration, guided descriptions and narrations, compositions with rewrites, free compositions, dialogue journals.

WRITING



and English as a Second Language



North Carolina has experienced a great deal of growth in the number of students whose first language is not English and who need language assistance in order to access and benefit from the total curriculum. Although the largest numbers of limited English proficient students are at the elementary level, increasing numbers of new arrivals are entering high school. Students progress in English at different rates depending on a number of variables including educational background, native language spoken, literacy skills in their native language, and previous contact with English. In any case, students generally have the greatest difficulty becoming proficient English writers.

For a second language learner, writing is an extension of listening and speaking. Therefore, the student must be provided opportunities to build, extend, and refine oral language in order to improve written output. Since writing involves some risk-taking, it is important for students to be comfortable taking risks. They need to know that their efforts are appreciated and that the message they are trying to convey is valued over the form.

The process approach to writing is ideally suited to the second language learner since listening, speaking, and reading can be so naturally integrated with it.

PRE-WRITING is essential for the writer whose first language is not English. Especially at the lower levels of proficiency, students have a limited lexicon and therefore often have difficulty expressing their ideas. Therefore, teachers or other students may need to assist second language students to generate vocabulary and grammatical structures relevant to the topic. Models and samples are often helpful.

USEFUL PRE-WRITING STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELLs)

- Brainstorming—depending on the students’ level of language, the writing down of ideas can be done by the teacher or by native English speaking students; the teacher may need to provide some guidance by asking questions to elicit vocabulary and structures associated with the selected topic
- Word banks generated by the students or as assigned by the teacher

- Drawing and sketching—enable students to illustrate ideas for which they do not have the language
- Discussion with native English-speaking peers or with the teacher
- Note-taking (often with the use of charts)
- Graphic organizers for eliciting, organizing and developing background knowledge
- Dictations—give learners some alternative models for addressing a writing task
- Researching and gather data by viewing videos, reading, talking, interviewing, and searching reference books or internet



At the **DRAFTING** stage students write their ideas down using some of the notes, language, and structures generated during the pre-writing activities. Second language students especially need to be aware that their first draft does not have to be perfect and that the purpose of this activity is to get words on paper. Spelling will often not be accurate and there may be many grammatical errors. Some students may also insert words in their native language.

USEFUL DRAFTING STRATEGIES FOR ELLs:

- Using notes taken during pre-writing activities— provides students with a starting point and a skeleton of ideas; especially useful for second language learners whose ideas are restricted by their limited vocabulary
- Sentence completions—may address the different ways to begin or end a paragraph or a story or may focus on vocabulary needed to describe or narrate a story
- Journal writing—allows students to take risks and experiment with language; it can provide a starting point for a longer writing assignment

***Special Note:** Translating is the least useful strategy for writing in a second language. There is often a wide discrepancy between what students can express in their first language and what their limited foreign language lexicon enables them to do. They frequently resort to using a dictionary to look up every word and end up with a literal translation that may be completely incomprehensible and even embarrassing.*

Second language learners will also need assistance during the **REVISING/EDITING** stage from teachers and from other students. Changes in writing will need to address word usage and clarification of ideas, as well as grammatical accuracy, punctuation, spelling and capitalization. It is important to remember that second language students may have difficulty recognizing their own errors or the errors of their peers. A self-assessment checklist may help them monitor their own writing. However, care should be taken with peer editing groups. In addition, it is important that correction be done in a comfortable environment.

USEFUL REVISING/EDITING STRATEGIES FOR ELLs:

- Peer or group reviews of mixed ELLs and native English speakers
- Language expansion and sentence combining activities—enable students to move beyond subject/verb/object format by encourage students to combine two or three different statements in various ways to make their sentences more complex
- Rearranging words within sentences
- Using dictionaries, including personal dictionaries, and other resource materials such as grammar books and textbooks

Second language learners should be encouraged to use **WORD PROCESSING** programs throughout the writing process. The programs facilitate the process and are especially helpful with the composing, revising, and editing stages because they do not require students to rewrite their work. They help students format their work and produce copies which are clearly legible and professional looking. These programs are especially helpful for students who are accustomed to a different alphabet (i.e. Chinese, Russian) and are only beginning to learn to write using the romanized alphabet for English.